Interlude: the Harrow Worker

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Interlude: the Harrow Worker

by stereokem

Summary

He had wanted an interpreter.

Will was an Ouija board.

Notes

You will observe that Jack switches quite often between using first names and last names. This is intentional.

This work is unbeta’d and self-edited.

See the end of the work for more notes

Hanging up the phone on Dr. Lecter felt like possibly the worst decision of his life.

Jack stared down at the cell phone clutched tightly in his broad palm; a deep frown was etched into his features, and his mind was buzzing like a disturbed beehive, an utter wreck of sound and emotion save for a few words which projected themselves starkly against the harsh, static-filled backdrop:

"Let me attend to this."

Dr. Lecter's voice with its odd accent, so smooth and unruffled and in control. There had been a subtle change, a note of combined surprise as Will had entered the room in Baltimore. Beyond that, however, any and all emotion had fled from the doctor's voice; but Jack had also heard the door open, a faint creak as Will stepped into the room. On the other side of the line 76 miles away, Jack had heard it, and his responses were not as fine-tuned as Hannibal's. He was prone and programmed to fast reactions, and his emotions flipped like a table between two barroom brawlers. He went from worry to anger in an instant. He was certain that, had he been in the room, circumstance would have found him bellowing at the missing man.

Circumstance, however, did not find him thus; it found him in West Virginia at his office in Quantico, listening to an interaction taking place in the heart of Baltimore, Maryland, a state-line and more than an hour's drive away. Unreachable. It was like listening to a play over the radio, a play that he knew he should have gotten a leading role in.

"Will has just set foot into my office."

Damn, though, had it been a blessingto hear those words come out of Dr. Lecter's mouth. What a relief to know that someone was laying eyes on Will Graham in the flesh, and that he hadn't dropped off the face of the earth, figuratively or literally. No one had understood the extent of his concern when he realized that Will Graham had been gone from the LeBeau house for over an hour (longer than he usually took to recoup), but that was because they couldn't see that this embodied one of Jack's primary concerns regarding his not-Special Agent: he was assiduously plagued by the thought that Will Graham might one day just disappear.

He had never voiced that concern aloud, and he didn't plan to. As far as anyone else was concerned, the biggest risk with putting Will Graham in the field to wade through puddles of blood and viscera was that it would do him irreparable mental harm. Jack Crawford held no illusions: he was more than certain that this work *was* doing him irreparable harm. There was no getting around it; that was the real price of Will's incredible empathy. Jack was almost certain that, eventually, this work would break Will; he already seemed to be developing cracks and fissures—j but that does not worry Jack.

He has been told by Bella that he uses people like gardening tools: he plunges them into the ground, uses them to churn the earth, and discards them when they become rusty and dull. Someday, Will's "gift" would fail him; someday, the monsters would be no longer accessible; someday, Will would be unable to distinguish between his own projections and what his instincts were telling him.

It was an ugly future, but Jack had mentally prepared himself for it. When the time came that he was no longer useful, Jack Crawford would remove Will from the field, just as Jack himself would be removed from the field when his age caught up to him. He would see to it that the FBI did everything in its power to accommodate Will, to try and feebly make up for all of the years of use and abuse. He was prepared for the fallout. He would still be in control, could still have a finger in the pie, monitor the situation.

But if the fallout came, and Will vanished—that was another matter entirely.

So, yes, it had been an incredible reprieve to know that Will was still here—or, at least, with Dr. Lecter.

Setting the phone down on the polished wood surface of his desk, Jack Crawford heaved a sigh through his nose and sat down in his office chair, hand over his mouth, eyes fixed on the back wall. It was quiet. Quantico was one of those places that was never really empty, but on this floor there was little activity, and no one passed by his office. It was late. He should go home.

And he would, as soon as the roiling in his gut ceased.

"Let me attend to this."

Jack was not used to receiving orders. He was so acclimated to being in a position to give them out, that he had almost disregarded the one Dr. Lecter had issued. He wanted Will here, needed him back under his thumb; but Dr. Lecter's tone was authoritative as it was sleek, and even Jack realized that, if Will Graham needed anything from him right now, it was space.

Then why did it feel as though he had just done something horribly, *horribly* wrong?

Idly, Jack rearranged a stack of papers on his desk, wondering what could be happening in Baltimore at this very moment. He was glad that Will had gone to Dr. Lecter. Jack had wanted to believe that he himself could be Will's anchor, but it was quickly apparent that Dr. Lecter had him beat in that capacity. It was good that Will had gone to someone who was stable, someone who was rational and firmly grounded in reality. It should have put Jack at ease to know that Will was in capable hands.

But was he? Jack didn't doubt Dr. Lecter's professional abilities; he was one of the most highly regarded psychiatrists on the east coast, and familiar with all types of neuroses and behaviors. But there was a temptation in psychiatry, he noticed, to bite off more than one could chew. He knew the type: they thought that, because they studied maladies of the brain professionally, they were as well-equipped to deal with things in the flesh as they were to analyze them on paper or in conference. Dr. Chilton—and even Dr. Bloom, on occasion—

was a prime example of this: he could write all he wanted about criminal psychoses, but his actual practice with them was fumbling and inept.

Of course, there was really no comparing Dr. Lecter and Dr. Chilton (that would have been insulting). If it had been Chiton on the phone (god forbid), there was no way on earth that Jack would have simply hung up. He would have forced Chilton to send Will away, send him back to Quantico, or at the very least put Will on the phone with him so that he could give him a lecture that would leave his ears ringing. Something about Hannibal Lecter, however, had caused him to reconsider the words he was about to dispel, made him relinquish his right to situational control and retract himself. So, he hung up.

As soon as he did, however, he was immediately seized with that sickening feeling. It was so overwhelming that it nearly made him physically ill, caused a wave of bile to lay a gentle touch at the back of his tongue. He almost didn't recognize it for what it was:

And that emotion, if anything, warranted serious contemplation on his part.

But he would not consider it, not now. Instead, he made himself more comfortable, and set about completing his oodles of paperwork, waiting for Dr. Lecter's promised call.

"He contaminated the crime scene."

Jack looked up from staring into his morning mug of coffee. Sleepiness attempted to cloud his mind but he swatted it away, like a dog snapping at its own fleas. Irritated as anything, he rounded on the speaker. "What?"

Price stood before him, with that ever-present flippant-yet-factual demeanor, not seeming at all concerned that Jack Crawford had just growled at him. To be fair, his attention was not focused on Jack, but on the forensics report he was holding.

"When we went back through the LeBeau bedroom, we took more photographs of the blood smears on the floor and the body. There are descrepancies between the photos taken before Graham entered and after."

Something cold slithered into Jack's belly. "Are you telling me he touched the body?" he asked slowly, the image of Will exiting the LeBeau house entering his mind. There had been no blood on his hands or sleeves that Jack had noticed, and he had exited carefully, with such utter and complete calm that only later struck Jack as unusual.

"Yes. It looks like he grabbed her around the neck sort of like—well, like the killer." Here Price did look up, somewhat sheepishly, knowing full and well that he was telling Crawford things the other man didn't want to hear.

Jack seethed. "Who else knows?"

“Beverly. She was the one who spotted it, actually.”

“Fine.” Jack stood, and buttoned his jacket. “No one else finds out about this, understood?” He barely waited for an answer as he made his way to the door.

Dr. Lecter had called him back almost three-and-a-half hours later, a quarter ‘til 12. Hannibal Lecter had always struck Jack as being a night owl, but when the man spoke over the phone, he sounded tired.

(There could be manyreasons for that, but Jack’s mind is wrapped around Will and he has very few thoughts to spare for the eccentric doctor.)

The psychiatrist had not told him very much, just enough to reassure him. He and Will had talked for a lengthy amount of time before Hannibal had driven Will home (Hannibal explained about Will’s vehicle, and between him and Jack arranged to have it returned to Wolftrap the following morning). He said just enough to assure Jack that Will was all right, but not much else. It was normal for Hannibal to not be totally forward with Jack concerning his conversations with Will, but this time the uncertainty burned in Jack’s ear. It was like he could hear all the empty spaces in Hannibal’s speech where undisclosed thoughts and memories hung. And all the while Hannibal was talking, all Jack could think was: *Did I break him? Was this the last straw?*

“Jack.”

Hannibal’s voice hissed through the cell phone, questioning.

"*Are you there?”*

He wondered, he really did. He wondered if Dr. Lecter was as far into Will’s head as he seemed to be. They were fairly close, Lecter and Graham, at least closer than Graham had been to anyone for as long as Jack had known him. Still, he wondered. If Will Graham had given him a torch and was leading him by the hand, or if he was stumbling around in the dark thicket of Will’s head, just like everyone else who ventured there.

He couldn’t know.

He had wanted an interpreter.

Will was an Ouija board.

When he first approached Will Graham, he had done so out of desperation. He had been warned—lord, he had been warned—about Graham's prickly personality, his uncanny airs, how shaky and scary he could be. But desperation makes many a man do things he wouldn't otherwise; so he appealed to Graham, and he had done so under the impression that he knew what he was getting. He wanted someone to read to him the signs; Will Graham could do that.

But when he saw what Will could do—what he could *really* do—it became apparent that what Jack Crawford was employing was not someone who merely interpreted the clues. Will didn't just *look* at a crime scene—he *channeled*. He didn't just scry the faces of killers in the calm pools of blood they left in their wake, he summoned them, resurrected them and let them possess him.

They were the only ones that had any real access to Will's mind.

That was the truly terrifying thing about that Monday night, on the phone with Hannibal as Will walked in the door.

Jack had been afraid; but he did not know if it was fear for Will, or for Hannibal.

When he had hung up the phone on Hannibal that night, a small part of him wondered if that would be the last time they ever spoke.

A small part of him had begun to regard Will Graham as a potential killer.

But when he had stormed into Will's full classroom and ordered everyone out, he had not seen a killer standing at the podium. He had seen a pale, exhausted, bedraggled man who had trouble making eye contact and a tremor waiting just beneath his skin. He looked wan, and tired, and weak. And his assurances and apologies were just enough to convince Jack to believe him, to believe that it wouldn't happen again, that Will was still in control.

He could feel Will beginning to break under his calloused palms; but he continued, because the earth needed churning, and Will was the best tool he had.

"I've only ever known Will as a man striving to be his best self."

"You haven't known him that long."

End Notes

As I was rewatching the first season, I noticed that fear is not an emotion that we see Jack display (at least, not in any sizeable or memorable quantity). We see him display sorrow, anger, concern, irritation, enjoyment, etc., but fear is not one of the cards in Jack's emotional hand. In the series, I think this is done deliberate to provide a direct foil for Will; however, OOC this might be, I thought it would be an interesting concept to explore. Here, I interpret Jack's fear not simply as fear of Will becoming a killer, but that Jack himself might have facilitated or even encouraged him to become one by such relentless exposure to the macabre. To my eyes, Jack is horrified that he could have created such a thing from someone with an intrinsically good heart like Will.

Also: A harrow, for those of you who are not familiar, is a farming tool. Older versions of harrows essentially look like a bed of spikes that is dragged along the ground to break up and churn the earth.

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